

## **Opening session of the EU Sustainable Energy week**

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**“Energy efficiency first” is the principle of considering the potential for energy efficiency in all decision-making related to energy.** *Where energy efficiency improvements are shown to be most cost-effective, considering also their role in driving jobs and economic growth, increasing energy security and reducing climate change, these should be prioritised* », reads the Coalition for EEF definition.

But in order to decide to give priority, you need to be able and willing to choose. Sometimes the most convenient and rational choices seem the hardest ones to make. It is like going on a diet: three carrots are by far less attractive than pasta al pesto. You feel like you are going to miss out on something and you think that this effort will not be rewarded by future gains. This is what some influential people in the European energy debate want us to believe: by deciding to disinvest from fossils, you will miss out on growth and comfort; by deciding to save energy in IT, lighting, transport, appliances, housing, and industry, you are limiting the EU industry’s competitiveness. But this is a very limited understanding of competitiveness, which focuses only on cost of labour and energy and pays very little attention to the quality of the product and its attractiveness to consumers and citizens.

Well, most of us here do not agree with such statements. A lot of us, participating to this week’s events, have very different backgrounds -industry, business, civil society, local authorities, and politics- and we do know that it is possible to escape fossil fuel dependency and create jobs (and we want it sooner rather than later); we know that it is possible to get out of the unreliability of old, risky, costly technologies like nuclear and to decrease emissions; that it is possible to get rid of false miracle solutions like fracking and clean coal and to be competitive with the US and with the rest of the world. Recently we have seen some positive developments in this respect. Although there is no earmarking for EE, we are encouraged by the strong mandate that the EIB received from European law-makers to support EE projects within EFSI and we think that it cannot afford coming back to the EP and to the Council without a strong lending record in this sector.

Still, we as business and civil society representatives have another dangerous trend to fight: the allergy of a lot of Member States -and even some Commission quarters - to the elaboration and implementation of a clear and cohesive EU legislation.

Indeed, we all know that we owe it to EU wide legislation that this old and slightly depressed continent became a model for the rest of the world for renewable technology and increasing energy efficiency. It was for lack of a binding EE target, that EE is still lagging behind; that it was so hard to get a meaningful EE directive.

With all due respect to M. Timmermans, I am not sure that in 2008 the climate package would have survived his « better regulation » set of rules and the voluntary obstacles that this agenda sometimes seems to pose to the Commission’s capacity to initiate bold common actions. This is a very risky approach: because of the lack of implementation and sudden changes of policy direction, we are losing ground and relevance: relevance

in terms of attractiveness of our still too fragmented energy markets for future oriented investments, but also relevance on the international energy and climate scene, where the once widely praised EU leadership is fading away.

While there are still many risks ahead, the most important among them is to miss out on important opportunities: a new EE target of 40% by 2030 would cut gas imports by 40%, increase GDP by 4.45%, and – coupled with more renewables – allowing Europe to deliver well beyond 50% greenhouse gas emission cuts by 2030.

*To conclude, Ladies and Gentlemen, we are encouraged by the fact that so many people within the Commission and PE, albeit not so many in the Council, like the concept of EE first and put it into practice. However, to adopt an attractive concept is not enough. Within the next months, we want to build a strong consensus around the idea that the artificial obstacles represented by the non-binding targets approved by the Council on EE and RES must be overcome. We don't want caps on EE and RES to stop the perfectly possible transition from fossil and climate damaging emissions and the creation of new quality jobs.*

*There is only one "cap" we can accept in this respect: the one I am wearing now!*

*Brussels, June 16, 2015*